

MULTIMEDIA



UNIVERSITY

STUDENT ID NO

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MULTIMEDIA UNIVERSITY

FINAL EXAMINATION

TRIMESTER 2, 2016/2017

LML0015 – MALAYSIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH
(All sections)

28 FEBRUARY 2017

2.30 p.m. - 4.30 p.m.
(2 Hours)

INSTRUCTIONS TO STUDENT

1. This question paper consists of **FIVE** printed pages with **2** sections only.
2. Answer **ALL** questions in **Sections A and B**.
3. Write **ALL** your answers for all sections in the answer booklet.

SECTION A: SHORT STORIES [30 MARKS]**Instructions:** Read the following short stories, and answer the question that follows.

Short Story 1

The Calculus of Happiness by Yeefoon Choon

I suffered from arithmophobia as a child. Of all the subjects taught in school, mathematics always made me lose all sphincters control. Numbers were peculiar to me when I was growing up. Sometimes they were odd. Sometimes they were even. And like us, they became complex as we moved from one age bracket to the next; eight was lucky; thirteen- bad luck and four was invariably tied up with death, for the Chinese. Zero was versatile depending on the angle from which you viewed it. To some of us, certain number like thirty four, as I discovered one day over MSN, could indicate that time was running out.

My friend, Kong, turned thirty-four last year. He was a successful producer for a local television station and single. His colleagues were ever fond of addressing him as the Big Producer, a badge he modestly declined to put on, whenever they left comments in his Facebook. Nonetheless, it made him feel invincible and happy. Several weeks after his birthday, Kong's mother, like a cat on hot bricks, grew more alarmingly concerned of the massive amount of "Single" boxes Kong had crossed, and, in cahoots with his sister, a beautician, organized two consecutive weekend Avon-themed parties to introduce girls they deemed were the right ones for Kong, in an attempt to save him from the eternal curse of childlessness and dying alone before "it's too late", his father warned severely.

After two unsuccessful matchmakings and embarrassing moments that felt like several lifetimes, Kong absconded from the third one on the day of our chat. It was on a Sunday and he peeled himself off, the way you would on the gum that got stuck on the sole of your shoes, from his bed and left home so early in the morning before the rooster had a chance to crow. For the next few hours, Kong roamed about aimlessly in the empty streets of KL until he found himself some safe distance away from the mind-numbing party and a kopitiam, the fancy sort that had mushroomed all over the city in recent years, parked his Toyota Vios and spent almost the entire day like a refugee inside that over-priced coffee haven.

When I came online later that morning, Kong was already determined to kvetch. He was getting fed-up and tired of the incessant question of "When are you getting married?" from relatives whom he couldn't decide if they were being genuinely concerned or just plain busybodies. It was a phase every single people of all ages was going through or had gone through. Some bachelors, and bachelorettes, buckled under the tremendous pressure of these unwavering interrogations, surrendered and grabbed the next girl or guy who happened to mosey by to walk down the aisle with. Even then, that would not stop them from extending the well-intended "When are you having

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children?" right after the wedding ceremony. And in the middle of his raves, on the little chat window, Kong wrote:

I felt like Harrison Ford today.

I typed: Really? Which one? Hans Solo or Indiana Jones?

He replied: The Fugitive!

He was a man on the run and being single was his crime.

I like children. But I am not ready for one of my own yet.

Besides who can guarantee that we won't die alone eventually?

While Kong contemplated the prospect of growing old as a contented single man, a message arrived in my Facebook's mailbox a couple of days later.

It was from Lina, a colleague I had not seen since she had her mole the size of a chickpea removed from her cheek in 1998, a move she firmly believed would greatly enhance her chance of meeting the right one. But a decade had passed and Linda was now thirty-four and still single. Lina was a doctor turned a Master's in International Public Health turned a secretary for UNICEF who turned out to be "the smelliest Asian pig I'd ever dated," her Aussie boyfriend shouted one day. And I believed it was not simply made up to evoke even a modicum of sympathy from me. Lina and I had dated briefly prior to 1998 and while out shopping together one weekend, she tried on a beige-colored tube and paraded in front of me barefooted asking for my input. In that moment, I caught a distinctive pong and it was then I knew in my heart that Lina would forever be condemned to an ineffable celibacy she did not desire.

But it would not have mattered, I thought, since she now had a promising career, traveled extensively for work and leisure and stayed in an expensive apartment near Kuala Lumpur City Centre. It was not until I received one of her rapid fire replies that I realized she was not happy. In my following reply, I walked her through all her accomplishments and after which, she wrote, Yeah, it is not bad, except there's no husband or child to call my own, "hahaha".

You could almost taste the bitterness in her laughter, virtually notwithstanding. Without a wedding ring to restrict the void expanding in her soul, all her achievements had equated to zero. So, that was what was dividing Lina from the happiness that she should be celebrating from the kind of happiness that only appeared relentlessly in fairytales. And I began to wonder if Lina had an innate fear for mathematics like me. In this complex calculus of life, some of us were born with a steep learning curve that enabled us to quickly master the art of counting our blessings. Unfortunately, some of us were not; like Lina: why should the minus of one, or two in her case, feel like it almost added up to nothing at all? And really, must we multiple in order to live happily ever-after?

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Short Story 2

Beneath the Picture by Adrian Young

My son called me up and asked me to get him an old family photograph, I kept wondering what the hell was he up to now? "Pa, I want to tell your story," my son told me, there was something in his voice he was serious about this pet project of his. He specifically asked for a photograph from one of our old photo albums. The old black and white photograph is at least 50 years old and has survived the many silverfish that infest our ancestral home. The picture shows a smiling family, as any family photograph should. Every picture should on the surface portray that impression for it to be considered a good picture. But beneath every picture lies a tale. Beneath this picture lies silent story that has been hidden for many years. A story that is never discussed. Much like in all old Chinese families traditions, nothing is spoken. Everything is dealt with within the family. Only what the family shows on the outside is important.

Beneath the smiles, the picture holds much. It is a story of jealousy, pain and hate. I really wonder who invented the line that blood was thicker than water. The Chinese family always keeps their dirty linen well-hidden deep inside the closet. I look at the picture again, there is my aunty, whom we called Yee Che which means Second Sister, she is actually Ah Ma's younger sister, Next is my eldest sister Ling Ka. Who is now unmarried, and has devoted her entire life to taking care Ah Ma and Ah Pa. Now her legs are stiffening and she has to undergo yet another operation. Another headache. Next to her is my third sister, the shortest of all my sisters, we used to call her "3 inch nail" in Cantonese or most commonly, Pik Ka. Next to her is my second sister, I was very close to her as she was the one who was in charge of taking care of me, when I had measles. She has a birthmark painted by God over her face. We now called her Maureen, her Catholic name from when we attended a missionary school. Next to Maureen is Ah Ma.

Ah Ma, my mother, the dragon lady of the family, now reduced to aged baggage regarded as burden by every single person of the family. It's amazing how a mother can bring up nine children but not one is willing to take her. It came upon my shoulders to bear this burden, but it was my wife who suggested we took mother in. All she said was "We have two sons also Pete. One day we'll be in Ah Dak and Ah Yip's mercy". True. Mother has survived one world war, a few recessions and many family squabbles that would put some of Chinese television dramas to shame. Dad was the melancholic man, one who toiled and worked as if there was no tomorrow, whereas Ah Ma was the sanguine one who oiled our family business. She was the competent communicator, the people person, she organized lavished dinners during Chinese New Year, commanded the children and relatives, adopted children, servants alike with military precision. General Patton would have been proud to have her as an officer. Our family was very liberal. We were business people. We survived the war because we adapted. My mother did business with the Japanese during the war, that's how we survived, all of us. She did

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business with the British when they came back. I remember how she would walk to the resident's office and do her stuff.

She was known simply as Madam Yong, no fancy title no nothing. She did not speak a word of English but somehow she managed to teach the Resident's wife the finer points of quilt work. At 96, she can still entertain Chinese New Year guests with rather candid stories of her golden years. Ah Pa on the other hand, was one who would bury himself in work. Without Ah Ma as second officer of the ship, Ah Pa's business might not have flourished so much. Maybe he was worn down because of his second business squabble, the one that I had to intervene in. He could have picked the eldest son, but he did not. He picked me. For what reason I will never know, the business was being torn apart in two by my second uncle. When it comes to money, there is no such thing as water or blood, just cold hard cash and victory. I had to come all the way back from Australia, I had dreamt of becoming a teacher there but fate took a different turn for me. I settled the business dispute for Ah Pa at 21. Gone was my innocence. Mum has always been behind me after that.

That's when the hate began, almost 30 years that dad passed away. That night, after the will was read, my family and I became public enemy number one. My eldest was in his teens, the youngest only 5. Even after 30 years, their hate and jealousy still survives, sibling love being less attractive than hate. My empire that I built by my own hands was torn to pieces. How did I survive that? The younger siblings in the picture are on the first row. I am the one on the right. Behind me is my eldest brother. The rest were all too young to know the truth, all they knew was appropriate half-truths. I had kept myself dumb on the facts, for the facts were much too hurtful. It is better for one to suffer than all to bear that pain. Ah Ma knew, maybe that's why she has decided to follow me. Until she draws her last breath, she says. I smile, for every year she lives, she, my wife and I joke, takes two years out of us. I looked at myself in the picture again. Although my youngest son looks like his mother, his zest, his nature reminds me of myself. One of my few hopes that I cling too now.

He should have been the pragmatist but he's the idealist. The eldest is everything he should be as a son. But the youngest is a drift. I lost that at 21. He will lose it too, when reality weathers and drags his flying soul down back to Earth. Sad but true. He graduated in marine biology, when I would have rather he became a lawyer. Now he has left his job. Says he needs to find himself. What will I do with this son of mine? Not to mention that he has never once brought a girlfriend home unlike the eldest. My wife and I wonder.

"Pa, I want to tell your story."

My story? Where do I even begin? I think, turning my glance back to the black and white photograph lying on the coffee table, I can only shake my head and shudder at the thought.

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SECTION A: SHORT STORIES [30 MARKS]**Instructions:** Answer the question below.

Based on both preceding Malaysian short stories, identify and elaborate on

- a) **THREE** (3) situations that can be considered a norm in Malaysian families.

(21 marks)

- b) **ONE** (1) similarity/ similarities that can be found in both families.

(9 marks)

Your answer should not be lesser than 300 words.

SECTION B: NOVEL [30 MARKS]**Instructions:** Answer the question that follows based on the Novel, “**A Malaysian Journey**” by Rehman Rashid.

Identify and discuss **THREE** (3) social issues that can be derived from the novel as expressed by the writer through his experience. You should support your answers with relevant citation(s) from the novel.

(30 marks)

Your answer should not be lesser than 300 words.

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